

Email Order of Service 24th May 2020 – Easter 7
for St Lucia Uniting Church congregation in their homes.



Greeting: Christ is risen: he is risen indeed!

Call to Worship -

Look up and see the heavens open and get a glimpse of the glorious mystery of God: Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit. Look down and touch the earth beneath us where Christ walked to reveal to us the God who loves us and offers us Life with God eternally.

Prayer -

God of new Life, you are a God of beginnings and endings, of seasons and cycles, of deaths and resurrections. When we find ourselves at a crossroads on life's journey, you call us to lift our heads and embrace the liminal space between ourselves and you. Thank you for the story of Jesus' ascension – we cannot fully understand it, but the mystery calls us to trust as he asked his disciples to do. Thank you for his promise to be with us always. Help us to grow into him and he in us this week, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

HYMN: AHB 27 Sing praise to God who reigns above (TIS 110)

Scripture Readings: Acts 1: 6-14; 1 Peter 4: 7-14 and 5: 6-11; John 17: 1-11

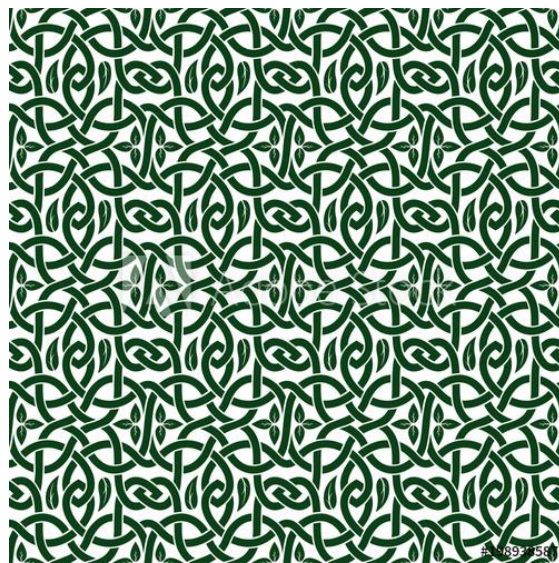
Prayer of Confession-

Sometimes, O God, your ways are a mystery to us. When we diminish the wonder of your glorious reality, shrinking it to fit the dimensions of our human limits, forgive us. When we doubt the possibilities of miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, forgive us and open up our eyes again. When we doubt your generosity which flows more widely than our visions of mercy, forgive us and open our hearts to join you. When we suffer for doing the right thing, we too often complain and doubt your presence, so please forgive us, O God and open our minds. Call us back to find our home and meaning in you, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Christ has walked in our world and knows what we face each day. He promised to be with us always through the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have been forgiven. Thanks be to God!

Sermon – Glory and Grace



In 1991 one Saturday afternoon, I sat in the National Gallery of Victoria viewing a painting 5m by 3m of blue/grey tangled 'string' on a white background. It was not like this deliberate, ordered Celtic pattern, but haphazard and intertwined. I cannot recall the name of the painting, sadly, nor its artist, but I do recall the conversation I had with a little elderly lady who reminded me of my mother, sitting beside me on the bench. We discussed the painting for a while and then I told her how I find great peace and stillness in an art gallery. She agreed and went on to tell me her husband had been instrumental in getting the NGV built. New to Victoria, I asked the name of her husband and discovered I was sitting beside Dame Elisabeth Murdoch.

John 17 reminds me of the tangled string painting – it seems to be all mixed up with some key themes mixed together. It reminds me of some of my prayer times when I am upset, and seem to ramble from one point to another in pain to God. As this was Jesus praying just before he was arrested, tried and crucified, the mixture of themes makes good sense for someone in a desperate situation baring his soul before God. The gospel writer has drawn together many key ideas in this final prayer which reflects the tradition in biographies of the time where major figures give important ‘final messages’ to their family and friends and posterity. The prayer is directed to God, but the disciples – original and future – are to draw comfort and inspiration from it.

Biblical scholars help us to untangle the truths drawn from the older traditions of Jesus’ last days and formed into a prayer that Prof. William Loader declares ‘belongs to the treasury of faith’ and is to be heard and reflected on by generations to come. At one level, this is a report from an envoy (Jesus) reporting to the One who commissioned him (God) that he has done the task given to him, and asking for help for those who are now commissioned to continue the task. The *task* has been:

- a) to give eternal life to all whom God had given to Jesus v.2;
- b) to reveal God and Jesus as God’s Son so that the disciples may know God v.3;
- c) to glorify the Father on earth v.4;
- d) to make God’s name known v.6;
- e) to pass on God’s words so that the disciples might receive them and believe the truth that Jesus was sent by God v.8.

The *purpose* of the commission is to glorify God by passing on eternal life (v.2) and enabling people to know God and Jesus (v. 3) through receiving the truth of Jesus as God’s Son (vs.6-8) and then becoming one with him and God and one another (v.11).

In prayer, Jesus asks the Father for glory in the next phase of the task – the ‘hour’ that has come in his passion and crucifixion; as well as to be reinstated in the glory he had with God before he came into the world. The reciprocal ‘glorifying’ of the Son and the Father is a reflection of their oneness in a dynamic relationship. This glory is not vanity or pride or glamour or notoriety for future favours from many people, as much human ‘glory’ for sporting or movie stars or even war heroes becomes. Jesus’ glory will be seen in his humble obedience to being betrayed, crucified – lifted up on the cross – to the apparent ridicule of failure in his task to be Messiah for Israel, but then in his ultimate triumph in resurrection and ascension to God which is witnessed by

his followers who then will be his witnesses throughout the world to bring God's eternal life to all who will believe their message. Eternal life is to know God and to know and believe the message Jesus Christ brought to the world about God – the TRUTH of God's GRACE – love and forgiveness and the offer of relationship with God and with one another as humans in God's family.

In the midst of the story about glory, Jesus prays for God's people – the disciples God gave him to teach. He knows his glory is seen in their response to his message, their willingness to obey his commands. He asks for God to protect them in the trials that will come to them in the future so that they stay united with one another and with God. He prays they may know his joy made complete in/among themselves (v.13). As he was commissioned by God, he commissions them: as he gives himself to the Truth, he asks they be kept safe in the Truth (vs.18-19). He prays that the love with which God loved him may be in them, and he in them – united as one with God and one another (v.26).

All this requires much GRACE from God for the humans who will fail, and suffer from their mistakes and the cruelty of others who oppose God's way. 1 Peter chapters 4 and 5 speaks to the suffering of both Jesus and his followers in the Christian community. It amplifies the problems Jesus asked God to protect his disciples *in* – not from. It reminds us to humble ourselves under God's almighty hand that we be lifted up in God's good time (5: 6) always remembering the promise that God cares for us and so we can leave our worries with God (v.7) who calls us to share eternal glory with Christ who will perfect us and give firmness, strength and a sure foundation (v.10.)

What a wonderful message for the Church at this time – with COVID 19 and the problems we find in being united as a community when we are so scattered and divided often in our opinions of what the way forward for us should be. Let God's GRACE flow over you and into you this week. As we let go of the physical presence and reassurance of Jesus for his disciples in the Ascension story of Acts 1, so we wait for God's Holy Spirit to come to us fully to be our Counsellor and Guide, our Defender and Advocate, our Interpreter of the Scriptures and Teacher. May you rest with the assurance that Jesus prays for you and the church around the world to be faithful, effective, confident witnesses to the Truth of God's love and grace offered to all. The Peace of Christ be with you. AMEN.

HYMN: AHB 85 To God be the glory (TIS 147)

Offering: A) Cheques to be made out to 'St Lucia UCA Parish account' and posted to 7 Hawken Dr, St Lucia Qld. 4067, please. OR
B) direct deposit to 'St Lucia Uniting Church' BSB: 334 040 acct#: 553 842 259 (St George Bank)

Affirmation of faith and commitment

We will listen for the presence of God, the Holy One, in our lives. We will look for the presence of the God of Love in the world. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we will testify to the God who is with us in times of suffering; and we will open our hearts in thanksgiving and praise to the God who assures us we are loved.

Prayers of Intercession Kay Bourne leads us:

Our Father in Heaven, we acknowledge You as our Creator and Lord. We thank you for the balance, the complexities, the beauty and harmony of Creation. It is marvellous in our eyes. And yet You have focused your ultimate plan upon us who are created in Your image. We were made to be in communion with You. You did not demand our allegiance You gave us a free will.

You are righteous, You are just. You are holy You are also merciful, kind, compassionate and loving. Thank you for Jesus who makes it possible by His obedience and suffering to be the means of our being able to know you personally.

We pray that we will be grateful, that we will walk in your ways. Where there is coldness in us, give us more love. Give us eyes to see what You do in our lives. Thank you for hope in darkness. Thank you that nothing is impossible for you. Remind us that there are treasures in darkness and that you can bring good things out of awful situations. Reassure us that it is alright to walk in darkness trusting in you because it pleases You to know that we know we are safe with you.

We pray for each other and remember David Adams in his recovery from a stroke and also Frances Sherry, that she will be sustained and healed. We pray for your presence with John and Anna and with all others battling cancer diagnoses. We pray for those serving in the medical field – for Julie and Hannah, for Rob and Catriona, and all the chaplains in our hospitals. For the lonely, those who have lost their job, all who are impacted negatively by the lockdown. Remind us to keep in touch with each other. Protect us and use us for Your glory. Keep us praying for those who are very needy and vulnerable at this time.

For the pandemic, for the locust plague in India and Africa. For developing countries that are not well equipped.

For the church to be revitalized when it opens again. For people generally to be open to you, Lord.

We ask this in the name of Jesus who taught us to say: Pray the Lord's Prayer.

HYMN: AHB 25 Sing praise and thanksgiving (TIS 107)

Benediction -

You have remembered God's redeeming love. You have sung of God's resurrection hope and been forgiven through God's grace. Now go to share God's presence in your community.

May the love of God be the strength of your heart and mind.

May the grace of Christ be the salve for your bruises and wounds.

And may the friendship of the Spirit be the joy and peace of your soul, now and forever more. Amen.

Next WEEK: Presbytery Pentecost service on Youtube – a link will be sent to you in an email.

Resources used in this service include *Words for Worship* Easter 7 year A **24th May 2020** by MediaCom (subscription of Rev Dr Elizabeth Nolan) and *The Abingdon Worship Annual 2020* edited by Mary Scifres and B.J. Beu, Abingdon Press, Nashville USA (owned by EN); *gathering Lent- Easter Year A 2020*, United Church of Canada (subscription); and *Uniting in Worship People's Book* by Uniting Church Press (JBCE) 1988 Melbourne and *The Australian Hymn Book* multiple copies owned by the St Lucia Uniting Church congregation. Copyright license 217268.

